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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine some differences between third grade children who were reading up to expected levels and those who were reading below expectancy as determined by the Spache formula. Subjects were 210 students reading at or above expectancy and 147 students reading below expectancy. In private interviews, each student was asked a number of questions about a variety of topics, including their attitudes toward reading and school. Those who read up to expectancy were more likely to understand why they were asked to complete worksheets at school, to read in bed at home, to have a hobby and a pet, and to enjoy reading at home than were those who were reading below expectancy. No difference was found between the two groups in terms of mothers working outside the home, the amount of television watched, or favorite books or television programs. Recess was the favorite school activity of both achievers and underachievers. (HTH)

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Some Differences Between Third Graders Who Read Up To Expectancy and Those Who Read Below Expectancy

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The purpose of the study was to determine some differences between third graders who were reading up to expectancy and those who were reading below expectancy. The researchers were seeking differences which a concerned teacher or parent could change. Thus, the population contained no students who could reasonably be projected to fall into the groups who were reading below expectancy. The population was all from suburban schools, of lower upper or middle class parents, white, non-repeaters of the grade, had never been classified as special education students, and had an IQ score on the Otis or Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Tests of 95 or above. These were students who could have normally been expected to read at grade level or above.

The teachers were all judged to be successful as the average of the students in each teacher's room were reading at or above expectancy. Reading expectancy level was computed by the Spache formula.

The intelligence tests and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills had been administered by the classroom teachers or the research supervisor for the school. The director of research of the schools had determined the expectancy level of each child and of the classroom.

Forty-two classrooms were visited. The enrollment in the classes varied from nineteen to thirty. In each instance the five students with the highest score of expectancy were selected. Then if there were five students who were below expectancy level they were selected for interviews.

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Thus 210 students at or above expectancy were selected and interviewed. Only 147 students who were below expectancy were found in these classrooms as several of the rooms did not contain five students who were reading below expectancy.

The selected students were taken one at a time to a quiet place outside of the classroom. The researcher explained to each student that she was interested in knowing about third graders and wanted to interview them to determine what they did and thought about several things. The questions were asked and recorded on the questionnaire. A sheet was made for each child with the questions already printed on the forms and a space for the answers. The questions were oral and the answers were written in the presence of the students.

On two questions there was almost a dichotomy between the answers of the students who were reading up to expectancy and those who were under-achievers.

"Why were you doing the page in your reading notebook?" All of the students who were reading at or above expectancy answered in a manner which expressed the idea that they were doing the page to learn. Some students even detailed exactly what they were learning on the page. Some even went as far as to explain why they needed to learn the particular skill. When asked, all of the achievers could tell the interviewer what they were learning by completing the page. Of the students who were reading below expectancy only ten answered anything which would imply that it was a learning experience. The most frequent answer of the lower achievers was a shrug of their shoulders, then when pressed for an answer, the most common answers were to keep us quiet, because she is having another reading

group, she is paid to make us work, to keep us busy, so we won't talk, and I don't know.

"At home where do you read?" The higher achievers answer to this question was a surprise to the researchers. More than half of them answered that they read in bed. Closer questioning led to the discovery that these children were regularly allowed to go to bed and then read for a set time. Comments would lead the interviewer to conclude that this was also a method which made going to bed easy for these children.

Underachievers most frequently answered by the TV. Some stated that they did not read at home unless their parents made them do so. None of the underachievers answered that they read in bed.

Another question to which there was a wide variance in the answers of the two groups was: "What activities, such as scouting, church, Little League, dancing lessons, music lessons, etc. do you do?" All of the achievers listed one or more activity, while only 50 of the underachievers named an outside activity which they attended.

The Chi-square test was used to determine if there were a difference at the .01 level. The difference was significant in the above questions and the following questions.

"Do you like to read?" The achievers answered yes more often than did the underachievers.

"Do you like to do the papers and pages in your notebook which the teacher gives you to do?" The achievers answered in the affirmative more often.

"What pets do you have at home?" The achievers were two times as likely to have pets at home as were the underachievers.

"What is your hobby?" The achievers were three times as likely to have hobbies as were the underachievers.

There was no significant difference in the answers to the following questions:

"Does your mother work outside of the home?" However, there were more of the achievers than of the underachievers who answered that their mothers were teachers and lawyers than did the underachievers. There were not enough of the sample who answered that their mothers were professionals to determine if the difference were significant.

"What is your favorite book?" There seemed to be no pattern to this answer until the observer found that the favorite book was usually the one in the child's desk or one which the teacher had out on the reading table. An observation would be that these third graders seemed to read and like what the teacher or learning center director provided for them.

"How often have you been to the public library this month?" Most of these children had not been to the public library that month. All classrooms had excellent learning centers or a large supply of trade books in the classroom.

"Do you like your teacher?" Only one child answered that he did not like the teacher.

"What is your favorite subject?" There was no difference in their choice. In fact, if the researcher had begun asking the teacher earlier what her favorite subject was, there likely could have been a high correlation established here. The researcher noticed that in any one classroom most of the children would answer the same subject or two of the same subjects.

"What do you like to do best at school?" Recess won easily both with the underachievers and the achievers.

"What is your favorite TV show?" There was a wide range of answers here. There was not a significant difference in the answers. However, the

examiner did notice that about one-third of the underachievers answered with shows which were after nine o'clock and only five of the achievers answered with a show after nine. No achiever answered with a show which was shown after 10:00 and 15 of the underachievers answered with a show which was after the news. Most children preferred comics, "Little House on the Prairie," animal shows, or Walt Disney films. Boys of both groups mentioned one or more of the sports.

"How much TV do you watch?" Although the reported time for both groups was about the same, the principal difference in the amount of time spent watching TV was the time of the year in which the questions were asked. When asked in February, most of the children stated that they watched TV from the time they came home, until dinner, then played a bit and then either watched TV or went to bed. In March, there was more playing and by April and May few of the children were watching TV until after dinner.

The next research should be for teachers and parents to determine if changing some of the habits which the children have would help the under-achiever or if there really is a relationship between these activities and the results in reading achievement.

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